THOUGHTS

ON THE

NECESSITY AND MEANS

OF A

REFORM

IN THE

CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

BY A FRIEND TO RELIGION AND HIS COUNTRY.

COME, AND LET US BUILD UP THE WALL OF JERUSALEM, THAT WE BE NO MORE A REPROACH.

NEHEMIAH ii. 17.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, NO. 72, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD; C. DILLY, IN THE POULTRY; AND T. KNOTT, NO. 47, LOMBARD-STREET.

1792.

BRITISH MUSEUM

THOUGHTS, &c.

[Price ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE.]

BRITISH MUSEUM

THOUGHTS, &c.

NOTHING has of late more cloſely engaged the attention of the public, than Political Inſtitutions; writers on the ſubject are, as uſual, divided in their opinions, and two different parties are formed.

The one ſays: "Let there be no change: inno-" vations are dangerous. When once people begin " to make alterations, we know not where they " will ſtop." The maxim of the other party is: " Let every thing that is amiſs be reformed; and " as ſoon as an evil or an abuſe is diſcovered, let it " inſtantly be removed." The firſt mode of reaſoning is admirably adapted to a Revelation from God; becauſe, as it is a Conſtitution framed by infinite wiſdom, the utmoſt exertions of human ſkill cannot amend it: To alter it, is to ſpoil it. But the laſt is that which alone is applicable to all human inſtitutions or forms of government, whether civil or eccleſiaſtical. To ſay there ſhould be no changes, is to ſanction all the abuſes which exiſt on the face of the earth; and muſt for ever retain the African

in his bondage, the Indian in his hut, the blind Devotee in his gloomy ſuperſtition, and the wretched Slave under the iron yoke of his unfeeling deſpot.

As it ſhould be the aim of all Societies to attain perfection, whatever is diſcovered to have that happy tendency ſhould be adopted; and as in the lapſe of years and change of circumſtances, things which at firſt were uſeful or harmleſs, become dangerous and hurtful, it is neceſſary to admit alterations from time to time. This is the ſpirit of the Engliſh Conſtitution, and the conſtant practice of the Legiſlature. In this work Parliament is employed from year to year. If it be the caſe as to ſome abuſes, why not extend the remedy to all? That ſmaller evils ſhould be removed, and greater ones ſhould be ſuffered to remain, is unreaſonable to the laſt degree. The greater the abuſes are, the more dangerous muſt they prove; and the greater anxiety ſhould there be to obtain a reform: the deeper they ſhoot their fibres into the heart and vitals of the Conſtitution, the more ſpeedily ſhould they be removed, leſt a diſſolution be the conſequence of neglect*.

Religion

* Should any plead that this cannot be done, becauſe it will conſiderably hurt the intereſts of many individuals, it is plain from the very objection, that there is ſomething in the government which cries aloud for a reform. It appears evident that the good of the whole community is not kept ſteadily in view, and is not chiefly purſued; that either from a bad government originally, or from the abuſe of a good one, private intereſt has grown to ſuch a magnitude, as not only to rival, but to obtain a preference to public benefit; and that ſo depraved a judgment prevails, that men

Religion has always been conſidered by the moſt enlightened politicians, as of the greateſt importance to the welfare of ſociety; by ſome, as eſſential to its very exiſtence. Whatever then prevents the influence of religion is prejudicial to ſociety, and ſhould be carefully and ſpeedily removed.

The deſign of an eſtabliſhed Church in any country is, or ought to be, to promote religion. That Church we may juſtly conclude to be the beſt conſtituted, which tends moſt effectually to diffuſe the knowledge and ſpirit of religion among the people. The Church, as ſuch, has no connection with the adminiſtration of civil offices, and the regulation of temporal affairs: to attend to theſe is the excluſive buſineſs of the ſtate. The ſole deſign of the Church is to make man good, and by the influence of the principles of chriſtianity, to lead them to a conſcientious diſcharge of every duty.

Some able writers have formed a viſionary ſyſtem concerning an alliance between Church and State. They have very ingeniouſly put a head and a tail to it; they have delineated its particular ſtipulations and engagements; and have told us accurately what duties the Church engages to perform to the State, and the State to the Church; what advantages the Church renders to the State; and what emoluments the State promiſes to beſtow on the Church in re-

men think and ſay that the whole community ſhould forego conſiderable advantages of which every member would reap the fruit, becauſe it would leſſen the emoluments which ſome individuals enjoy at the expence of the State from which they received them.

turn. He that derives his ideas of the Church from the word of God, ſearches for this alliance there in vain, and can never entertain any other view of it than as a mere human contrivance. Nor indeed even in this inferior view is it poſſible that in this country ſuch a thing can ever exiſt. The Church is not an independent body, but like the Army and the Navy, a creature of the State; and there is juſt as much ſenſe and reaſon in the Army and Navy entering into an alliance with the State, as in the Church pretending to do ſo.

If we admit of an alliance, inſtead of deriving it from chriſtianity, we muſt deduce it from a crooked human policy. The religion of Jeſus does not interfere with any forms of civil government. Theſe are matters with which it has no concern, and to which the reaſon and good ſenſe of mankind are fully adequate. Religion teaches men good principles, and directs them how to act in ſociety as already eſtabliſhed. In ſhort, this alliance is either a mere non-entity, or it is ſomething bad which ought to be deſtroyed. If by it the Church binds itſelf to endeavour to make men good, it is *nothing*, for this is the very deſign of the Church, the very end of its inſtitution, and there is no need of an alliance to enforce it. If the deſign of this alliance on the part of the Church be to make men ſubmit to the government under which they live, it is either *nothing*, or it is *ſomething bad*. If the government be good, and employ its powers to promote the public welfare, common ſenſe as well as intereſt will teach men not only to obey but to ſupport it; and there

is

is as little need of the Clergy and the Church to enforce ſubjection, as there is for them to urge men to eat when they are hungry, and to drink when they are dry.

But if the ſtipulation of this boaſted alliance on the part of the Church be, that ſhe ſhall uſe all her influence to make the people meekly acquieſce in all the bad meaſures of government, and patiently ſubmit to oppreſſion and the loſs of privileges, the Church is acting an infamous part, ſpeaking lies in the name of the Lord. She is become a mean tool of the civil Rulers, and is proſtituting the religion of Jeſus Chriſt into an odious engine of State; for where is there one injunction in the ſacred ſcriptures which requires a member of civil ſociety to part with his rights and privileges, and ſubmit to be treated as a beaſt of burden, rather than a man formed after the image of God? So that we may juſtly conſider every idea of ſuch an alliance, as a ſubtle contrivance of fawning prieſts to rob mankind of their unalienable rights, and to make a preſent of them to the powers that be, that Kings and Prieſts, and Nobles, may rule the body of the people with a rod of iron. Infidels have often enjoyed a fancied triumph on this account; but it has been merely by confounding the nature and ſpirit of religion, with the abuſe of religion by unprincipled and mercenary men. Chriſtianity gives not the ſmalleſt countenance to tyranny and oppreſſion, and carries in her hand no chains to enſlave the human race. All the blame falls on falſe, deceitful men, who in the garb of religion have taught the precepts of deſpotiſm, merely for their

own private advantage, and in order to gratify the rulers of the world.

Should it here be aſked, how then is Religion or the Church a benefit to Government and to civil Society, I anſwer, The Church was inſtituted by its great Founder, ſolely with a view to promote religion. The deſign of religion as revealed in Scripture, is to make men wiſe, and good, and happy. It teaches them how to act towards God and towards man. It ſets before them the duties of every relation, and inſtructs them how they ſhould demean themſelves as huſbands, as parents or children, as maſters or ſervants, as rulers or ſubjects. By thus forming good men, and virtuous citizens, religion is of eſſential ſervice to civil ſociety, and the Church, whoſe office it is to promote religion, is of the higheſt utility to the virtue, peace and happineſs of the community.

If the Church, inſtead of zealouſly promoting religion, ſhould become inattentive to her office, and unfaithful to her truſt, a Reformation ought inſtantly to take place; and it is the duty of every good man to forward it to the utmoſt of his power. The evil is unſpeakably great: it ſaps the foundation of ſociety; it fills the country with bad citizens, and ruins mens' eternal felicity. Where care is not taken to impreſs the mind with a deep ſenſe of religion, we may naturally expect to ſee people exceedingly defective in every moral duty, ſociety filled with crimes, and the State reduced to the painful neceſſity of cutting off very many of its members. In ſuch circumſtances, a reform in the Church ſhould be ſought, and ſhould take place.

How

How far this is the caſe in the Church of England, let every impartial man judge and declare. That crimes abound among us to an extent unknown in any other civilized country in the world is, I am afraid, too plain to be denied. Every aſſize ſends ſo many unhappy wretches to the gallows, that the number of the victims of juſtice fills every compaſſionate heart with horror. Beſides the gaols are crowded with felons: the highways are infeſted with highwaymen and footpads: the ſtreets of the metropolis at night are crowded with proſtitutes, ſeducing youth to impurity: ale-houſes fill the land, and they are filled with drunkards at every hour, who waſte their ſubſtance, prepare themſelves for the perpetration of other crimes, and leave their families a burden on the public. The vicious modes of living in the great and faſhionable world, are carried to ſuch a height, that they do not now as formerly ſhun the public eye; but perſons who from their rank and ſtation ſhould be examples of virtue to others, and ſhould at leaſt revere the deciſion of the people, go into the moſt public places of reſort, accompanied by the impure partners of an illicit commerce, with as much freedom and boldneſs, as if they were conducting an honourable matron, or the virtuous partner of their days. Every man who acts thus thruſts a poignard into the vitals of ſociety; and it is owing only to the want of ſtrength that he does not effect its diſſolution. The complaints of corruption among the people are ſo loud from every quarter, as to ſtun us with their noiſe; and thoſe who are beſt acquainted with the mode of obtaining public offices, and with

the conduct both of high and low in the event of an election for members of Parliament, will confeſs, with anguiſh of ſoul, that they are but too true.

Foreigners remark with aſtoniſhment the groſs ignorance of the nature of religion, and the diſregard to its inſtitutions which ſo commonly prevail. Every enlightened patriot muſt view the ſcene with a bleeding heart; and when we conſider for a moment, that theſe vices are in the higheſt degree detrimental to ſociety, and that they rob man of eternal happineſs, and plunge him into the miſery of a future ſtate, we ought moſt paſſionately to wiſh, and moſt earneſtly to endeavour, that they may be leſſened, if they cannot be entirely removed, and that meaſures may be adopted for this end without delay.

But in order to remove theſe evils, we ſhould firſt inveſtigate their cauſe. Whence do they ariſe? There muſt be either ſomething bad and very vicious in the natural diſpoſition of the Engliſh, or there muſt be ſomething in the form of government unfriendly to virtue; or the Clergy muſt be wanting in their endeavours to inſtil the principles of religion, and by enlightening the mind, to form the ſoul to goodneſs. That the fault does not lie in the National character, I boldy aver. An Engliſhman well inſtructed, whatever ſtation of life he may hold, is univerſally allowed not to yield in point of reſpectability, to a native of any other country in Europe. Nor does our government merit any peculiar degree of blame. The civil inſtitutions for promoting the virtues of the people, will fairly ſtand a compariſon with thoſe of any other nation. Is it owing then to

the

the Clergy that vice does ſo much abound? Yes, to the Clergy do many intelligent men ſay it is owing; and that to a moſt culpable neglect in them, we may attribute a large portion of thoſe vices and crimes which diſgrace ſociety. The corruption of the Church is, according to their judgment, the great and criminal cauſe of very many of theſe evils which I have juſt enumerated. This corruption, they aſſert, is ſo extenſive, that it loudly calls for a radical and ſpeedy reform. Perhaps this may be deemed a piece of malicious defamation, and evidence of the corruption of the Church may be demanded. Evidence ſhall be produced.

I know I am undertaking an invidious taſk; but we muſt not refuſe to enter the augean ſtable, on account of its nauſeous ſmell: ſome will not believe that it needs cleanſing till they ſee it. Beſides a ſight of it, however diſguſting, may ſhew us the cauſes of its filth, and point out the means of its being cleanſed. Before I proceed, I beg leave to remark, that when I ſpeak of the corruption of the Clergy, I do not mean that every member of the heirarchy is a vicious character. Far from it. I believe there are men of as great learning in the Church of England, as in any other, and that there are hundreds of as pious, faithful, and good Miniſters in her communion, as are to be found in any Church on earth. But I ſpeak of the Church, as we do of civil ſociety. We call a government corrupt, when the majority of thoſe who adminiſter it, are deſtitute of true patriotiſm; a Parliament corrupt, when the greater part of its members are penſioners and place-

men

men, and the creatures of the Miniſter; and a people corrupt, when depravity and vice have pervaded the general maſs, although there may be found many excellent members of the community untainted with the general corruption.

Ignorance I place at the head of the liſt of thoſe vices which render the Clergy juſtly chargeable with corruption. Many of my readers, aſtoniſhed at the charge, exclaim, "The Clergy of the Church of "England ignorant! They are the moſt enlightened "body of men in the univerſe." So it is ſaid. That individuals among them yield to no human being in learning and piety, I with pleaſure allow; but I am fully of opinion that as a body, the Clergy of the Church of England are the moſt ignorant of any in the Proteſtant Churches, and are inferior in knowledge even to the prieſts in ſome countries ſubject to the dominion of Rome. When I ſpeak of ignorance, I do not mean of Greek and Latin, and Philoſophy, (none excel them in the knowledge of theſe) but of their own proper ſcience, *Ignorance of Theology*. The knowledge of the ſacred ſcriptures is the firſt and moſt important object of a Miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt; nay, is abſolutely neceſſary to the faithful diſcharge of his office; and he who does not underſtand the doctrines of the New Teſtament as a ſcience, whatever elſe he may know, is an *ignorant man*. If it ſhould be ſaid of a Counſellor that he is the firſt Aſtronomer in Europe, but knows nothing of the Law, we ſhould regard him as an ignorant Lawyer, unfit to be adviſed with for the preſervation of our property. Should this character be given of a Phy-

a Phyſician, "He never applied his mind to the "ſtudy of Medicine, but he ſpeaks Latin like Cicero, "and writes Greek with the purity, richneſs, and "elegance of Plato;" we ſhould, if the life of a friend were at ſtake, avoid him as an ignorant man in his profeſſion, much more likely to kill than to cure. So it is in regard to a Miniſter of the Goſpel. If any ſhould ſay of a man who bears this name, "He never ſtudied the Bible, and under-"ſtands very little of what it contains; but he is an "exact ſcholar in the Greek and Latin Claſſics; he "underſtands ſeveral of the Oriental Languages; he "can ſpeak moſt of the modern Tongues of Europe; "he is a good Mathematician and Natural Philo-"ſopher; and he has treaſured up in his mind the "fineſt ſayings of the ancient Sages;" ſtill I inſiſt on it, he is an ignorant Clergyman; and the ſouls entruſted to his care are in danger of periſhing for lack of knowledge. The reaſon is plainly this: The knowledge of Languages is as means to an end; and it is valuable to a Clergyman, chiefly as it aſſiſts him in underſtanding the Scriptures. But if he reſts in the means, and does not apply it to the proper end, all this knowledge is of no ſervice to him in his Clerical office, and he is more unfit for the ſacred function than the moſt illiterate Methodiſt, whoſe mind is imbued with the ſaving knowledge of Divine Truth. I inſiſt the longer on this point, as I know the violent prejudices which induce many to think that the knowledge of the learned Languages, and a fitneſs for the Clerical office, are one and the ſame thing. Theſe prejudices will appear the more

unreaſon-

unreaſonable, if it be conſidered that the primitive Biſhops appointed by the Apoſtles underſtood only their Vernacular tongue. But they poſſeſſed the qualities mentioned in 1 Tim. iii. 2, 3, 4. They were good men; they underſtood the doctrines of chriſtianity; and they were apt to teach. I wiſh all the Clergy more learning than they poſſeſs: but if there were a better underſtanding of the ſcripture, although there ſhould be a ſmaller meaſure of human literature, it would conduce infinitely more to the happineſs of the people. This ignorance of which I complain has ceaſed to become matter of ſhame. The newſpapers, which may juſtly be called the loudeſt trumpeters of fame, proclaim it through every corner of the land. Dr. Truſler advertiſes his copper-plate Sermons, reſembling manuſcripts, for the uſe of the Clergy: and the extenſive ſale of them announces the ignorance and infamy of the Church.

I conſider it as another juſt cauſe of complaint, that there is *ſo little of the ſpirit, and even of the very form and appearance of religion.* This is a peculiarity belonging to the Engliſh Clergy, and to be found no where elſe in Europe. In every other country, the Clergy have at leaſt the ſemblance, if they have not the reality of religion; and that gives ſome degree of decency to their character. But in England, there are thouſands of the ſons of the Church who have nothing about them that announces any connection with the Mitre, but a black coat and curled hair. They engage in the ſacred inſtitutions of public worſhip according to the rituals, or what they call *doing duty.* But for any thing of religion

in

in their temper, conduct, converſation, and family, you might as eaſily find it in Gibbon or Voltaire.

Some of the Clergy are men of pleaſure, and are to be found in great abundance at aſſemblies, balls, theatres, watering-places, horſe-races, and at every amuſement that attracts the trifling, the idle, and the gay. In this way is the time of thouſands ſpent; and if a dozen of *bons vivans* be met together, it will be ſtrange if you do not find one Clergyman or more among them. Not a few of theſe men who have declared they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt to take upon them the paſtoral office, are open drunkards and ſwearers. The lives of others are blackened by the moſt odious crimes. Seducers of young women find the gate of the church open to receive them. Do we not ſometimes ſee in the newſpapers, actions of crim. con. carried on againſt Clergymen? And have we not of late years obſerved ſome of them, after a long career of wickedneſs, ſuffering the extreme puniſhment of the laws, as a juſt award for their hateful crimes. I bring no unjuſt accuſation againſt them, nor do I draw the unpleaſing picture with malice, but with grief of heart. And I appeal to every man of extenſive information, who is acquainted with the nature of religion, and who has viſited other Proteſtant countries in Europe, if ſuch a conduct and ſuch vices are to be obſerved in their Clergy, and if they are not too often to be found in ours? If only a very few out of ſo many were of the character that I have deſcribed, it would be illiberal to bring the charge againſt them; but if the caſe really is, that you can

hardly

hardly go into a place without hearing of the vices of the Clergy; if you ſee them the moſt forward in every amuſement, and the moſt backward to every exerciſe of piety, and more afraid of Methodiſm than of vice; if you hear of hundreds of vicious characters who deſerve the puniſhment of the laws as open corrupters of the human race, and if ſome go the greateſt lengths in wickedneſs ſo as to be viewed by every man of decency with abhorrence, is there not reaſon to complain aloud, "The Clergy of the Church "of England are exceedingly corrupt."

In addition to the evils already mentioned, it is neceſſary to mention *Sloth* and *Indolence*, and a *Neglect of Paſtoral Labours*. Some things the law obliges them to perform, and no thanks to them if they do theſe. But a good Clergyman, who has the ſpirit of his office, will exert himſelf to the utmoſt for promoting the eternal happineſs of his flock. Inſtead of making the law of the land the rule of his labours, he will regulate his conduct by a nobler rule, the law of love to God and man; and will think himſelf obliged to do every thing for their happineſs that is in his power. But how few Clergymen do we find of this character? Do we not plainly perceive great numbers of them come ſlowly and unwillingly to the painful taſk? Some repeating the offices in a grudging, diſcontented tone? Others running through the duties preſcribed, with the haſte and careleſsneſs of a ſchool-boy? Others going calmly through the drudgery of office without a feeling but of diſguſt, without a wiſh, but that it were done? Thouſands perfectly ſatisfied with the mere repetition

of

of forms? How ſeldom is it that we find the Clergyman labouring in public and in private, in the houſes of his pariſhioners, and in the Church, to inſtruct the young in a rational manner, to teach the ignorant, to reclaim impenitent tranſgreſſors, to confirm the wavering, to ſupport the weak, to comfort thoſe that mourn, and to ſoothe with the conſolations of the goſpel the laſt hours of the dying man? Theſe, alas! are too uncommon, and yet they are traits in the character of every good miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt. What we too often obſerve is a man in a clerical attire, repeating certain preſcribed offices; and when he has done, never once enquiring whether his hearers are edified or not, and not troubling himſelf whether they go to heaven or hell.

Pluralities and Non-reſidence conſtitute another part of the corruption and diſgrace of the Church ot England. Theſe two evils need only to be named in order to draw forth the execration and abhorrence of every pious and upright man. Of all the Proteſtant Churches, the Church of England alone is the theatre of theſe abuſes; and Biſhop Burnet ſays, that in his time they were carried to a far greater exceſs than in the Church of Rome. If it was ſo then, what would he have ſaid if he had lived in the preſent day? It is a plain maxim of common ſenſe, that the ſcene of a perſon's labours ſhould not exceed the compaſs of his abilities. If there be any one inſtance in which this ſhould be the caſe more remarkably than in all others, it is where ſo weighty an affair as the charge of ſouls is depending. Accordingly, ſociety has taken up the matter, and has divided the

people

people into parishes, each of which is considered as sufficient to employ the labours of a Clergyman. Reason points out this as highly proper. Should we not suppose then that a man of a tender conscience, who expects to appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ to give account of his Stewardship, would not wish to extend the boundaries of his charge beyond what he could faithfully attend to and oversee? But what is the state of things among us? Pluralities abound in every corner of the land. We find everywhere Clergymen who have two or three Livings; and if Pluralities do not swallow up three-fourths of the Livings in England, I ask, is it for want of inclination, or of interest to obtain them? The only valid excuse that a good man could form for having more Livings than one, would be, that the first contained but few people, and was not sufficient for the support of his family; and as the other was contiguous, he could perform with ease the office of a Pastor to both. But do we not too often see a Clergyman have more Livings than one, when each of them is more than sufficient for the decent support of a numerous household, and furnishes a scene sufficiently large for the fullest exertions of his talents. At the same time the parishes are so far distant from each other, that for one person to perform the duty in both is absolutely impossible. So common is this evil now become, that it has lost the infamy which is rationally attached to it, and is looked on as not a disreputable practice. It is astonishing, that the absurdity of it does not more forcibly strike the mind. If a Captain of the Navy,

on

on being appointed to the command of a ſhip, ſhould prepare to ſtay at home with his friends, and to ſend a perſon in his place, he would be laughed at as a fool by every man in the fleet; but if he ſhould apply for two or three ſhips, and offer to command them by proxy, it would be concluded by all, that he was undoubtedly mad. It would appear equally ridiculous in the caſe of a Surgeon. But is it not a matter of wonder that a ſimilar practice ſhould be common in the Church? Is it not here ſtill more ridiculous and abſurd? For certainly the ſalvation of the ſouls of a pariſh, if we compute the meaſure of human happineſs that is at ſtake, is of infinitely greater importance than the health or ſafety of a ſhip's company. Not only is the practice *abſurd*, but *impious*, in a very high degree. However, ſuch is the preſent mode of judging, that a Clergyman would be conſidered by very many of his brethren, as a man of a weak, ſcrupulous mind, who would not accept more Livings than one, if he could obtain them. He would even be looked on as really wanting to himſelf, if he did not exert all his intereſt, to collect as large a portion of the treaſures of the Church as he poſſibly could. Of late, ſince it has become faſhionable for younger ſons of Noblemen to enter into holy orders, the evil has encreaſed; and there is an accumulation of larger maſſes of Church property, in order to ſupport what they call the dignity of their rank.

Non-reſidence is naturally connected with Pluralities. A Clergyman cannot at one time be at two or three places which are hundreds of miles

distant from each other. Great part of his work, therefore, must be done by proxy; and if God, at last, would judge and condemn by proxy, all would be very well. To such a height is the practice of non-residence arisen, that frequently a person who has several Livings resides on none of them. There is some favourite spot which he prefers to his own parishes, and there he fixes his abode. Once a year he pays a visit to his Living, and perhaps officiates two or three times to those people whose souls he solemnly swore he would superintend, and endeavour to the utmost of his power to save. What is to be expected from men who thus trifle with the most sacred oaths?

It is even become fashionable if a Clergyman have but one Living, a rich rectory, not to reside, but to employ a person for a trifle to do the duty, and to live at his ease on the remainder somewhere else: or if the Living be pleasantly situated, if there be an excellent Parsonage, and many Gentlemen and Noblemens' seats in the neighbourhood, he resides, it is true, but preaches seldom or never. One great advantage of his residence is, that he can more easily and minutely observe if it be possible to raise the Tithes, and improve the Living. If such instances occurred but once or twice, they might be tolerated and overlooked; but they abound in every part of England*.

When

* This conduct of the Clergy has given rise to an order of men unknown in any other Protestant Churches: I mean *Curates*, who may

When I look over the portrait that I have drawn, I profeſs, in the ſincerity of my heart, that I am deeply grieved, and wiſh it were the moſt hideous caricature that ever appeared. But truth compels

may juſtly be called *Journeymen Parſons*. They are conſidered as Underlings, who have not the charge of the Flock, nor are connected with it by any mutual ties; but are paid by the Parſon of the Pariſh to do the work, which he ſolemnly vowed at the Altar of God to do himſelf. In other churches, when age and infirmities have rendered a Miniſter unable to perform his duty, an Aſſiſtant is allowed; but here ſtrong healthy men, who are able to be out all day at fox-hunting, and to ſit up at card parties, balls, and aſſemblies, till after midnight, employ Curates with no other view, but that they themſelves may enjoy a life of ghoſtly eaſe and indulgence. While the Rector is thus engaged, the vulgar offices of the miniſtry are performed by a needy Curate. Perhaps, poor man, he has a family, and is therefore obliged to ſerve two Cures, to get bread for his children, which after all his toil he is ſcarcely able to do. It has the appearance of a Farce, rather than of a ſolemn Service, to ſee the Curate, in many a country church, run through the prayers as faſt as he can, hurry over a diſcourſe of five or ten minutes in length, and immediately ſet off full gallop for two or three other churches at ſome miles diſtance, which he muſt likewiſe ſerve. As this is all that the people ſee or hear of the Parſon till the following Sunday, it muſt ſurely be by a miracle if any good be done, and the people be rendered either wiſe or pious. I have often been aſtoniſhed that the good people of England have permitted this abuſe to riſe to its preſent height, and to continue unreformed. Curates have in general as liberal an education as Biſhops; they are qualified for the higheſt offices in the Church, and they do the greateſt part of the duty that is done in England. They are, as a body, as reſpectable in their behaviour, and as exemplary in their conduct, as the beneficed Clergy, (inferior to them only in intereſt with the great); and yet ſo wretched is the proviſion made for them, that their ſalary does not, on an average,

me to ſay, it is a ſtriking likeneſs. The features are juſtly repreſented, the colours are not overcharged, and the unſeemly countenance of the picture is owing to the diſguſting viſage of the original*.

That

equal the wages of a London Journeyman Taylor; and while others of the Clergy are racking off their exceſſes at every joint, they are in a ſtate of abject poverty, and have ſcarcely bread to eat. That men who are the moſt laborious of any of the clerical order, and who, if the performance of divine ſervice be a matter of any value, have the merit of doing far more than one half of it, ſhould be expoſed to the contempt and ridicule of the rich for the mean appearance that they make, while the indolent Rector, after ſurveying his roomy barns which can ſcarcely contain his tithes, looks down with a ſupercilious eye on the middling claſs of citizens, is a diſgrace to the country, an injury to the morals of the people, and deſerves the ſpeedy and ſerious attention of the Legiſlature of Great Britain.

* I could adduce a great variety of teſtimonies to confirm the account that I have given of the corruption of the Clergy, but I ſhall mention only two. The firſt is from a Member of their own body, the Rev. Thomas Haweis, L.L.B. Rector of Aldwinckle, who has been in the church above theſe thirty years, and has conſequently had an opportunity of knowing his Brethren well. In a volume of Eſſays on the Evidence and Characteriſtical Doctrines of Chriſtianity, publiſhed laſt year, being led to ſpeak of the irreligion and vices of the age, he hath theſe words:

" The hand of the *Prieſts* alſo hath been chief in the tranſ-
" greſſion. The Clergy *worldly-minded, proud, ambitious, idle, ig-*
" *norant*, however learned as Philoſophers, Linguiſts, or Mathe-
" maticians, ignorant of that which is the moſt valuable wiſdom,
" are the blind leading the blind. Are not the *Herd of Dignitaries*
" the chief ſtumbling-blocks? Muſt not their whole *purſuits, con-*
" *nections, conduct*, convince the very infidel great that they fawn on

" and

That a Reform is abſolutely neceſſary, who can doubt? Muſt not every lover of his country lament that ſo many of the people ſhould, by the negligence of the Clergy, become the prey of vice, languiſh in dungeons, wear the chains of criminality,

" and perſecute for preferment; that if the ſyſtems inculcated in " the Epiſtles to Timothy and Titus be true, it is impoſſible theſe " men ſhould believe one word more of chriſtianity than themſelves†." " Nor are their inferiors diſſimilar; enſlaved by the " ſame objects, and occupied by the ſame purſuits, ſubſcribing " Articles they have hardly read, never conſidered, and generally " diſbelieve! That the body of the people with ſuch examples, " and ſuch teachers, ſhould be corrupt, diſſipated, debauched, " profane, intemperate, ignorant, yet infidel, is perfectly natural, " and to be expected in the courſe of human events, as we ſee " awfully verified."—In another part of the ſame treatiſe, he thus addreſſes the heads of the Church: " If its moſt important ſeats " be filled without reſpect to fidelity,—if intereſt, influence, " or worldly conſiderations, have determined the choice, and " thoſe are ſet up to feed the flock of Chriſt, whoſe uniform ſyſtem " of earthly-mindedneſs, indolence, and ambition, to ſay no " more, demonſtrate that they have never entered into the fold " by the door, but climbed to theſe ſummits ſome other way, " whether for ſuch advancements, there will not in ſome future " day be a reſponſibility."

To this teſtimony I add that of Viceſimus Knox, M. A. who was educated at one of the Univerſities. In one of his Eſſays he has theſe words: " The public have long remarked with indig- " nation, that ſome of the moſt diſtinguiſhed coxcombs, drunkards, " debauchees, and gameſters, who ſhine at the watering places, " and in all public places, but pulpits, are young men of the " ſacerdotal order."

† Theſe were as nearly as I can recollect the very expreſſions uttered by a noble Lord of the moſt diſtinguiſhed attainments, natural and acquired, in a converſation I once had with him reſpecting the truth and evidence of chriſtianity.

and end an ignoble and wretched life by the ſword of public juſtice? Muſt not every pious chriſtian bewail in tears the miſerable condition of multitudes, who are abandoned by the negligence of the prieſthood, to groſs ignorance and wickedneſs, and ſuffered to fall headlong into the miſery of a future ſtate? And ought not all to join in ſeeking a reform of the Church, and a more learned, pious, and laborious Clergy? But that we may more diſtinctly perceive both the propriety and the nature of the Reform required, it will be of uſe to inveſtigate the cauſes of the corruption of the Church. We ſhall, at the ſame time, more clearly diſcover the pernicious effects that this corruption has upon the morals of the people. Theſe indeed are ſo intimately blended, that it is difficult to conſider them ſeparately.

The evil frequently originates in the choice of the perſons deſtined for the clerical office. In a view to other employments, regard is had to powers and talents. No one thinks of making a cripple a ſoldier, or a blind boy a ſailor. If a lad be ſo ſtupid that he cannot learn, it is not thought proper to bring him up for a Counſellor. But it very often happens, that a perſon deſtines one of his ſons for the Church, becauſe he has intereſt ſufficient to procure a Living, or becauſe there is an advowſon in the family. Whether the youth diſcovers a pious diſpoſition, and promiſes to be an exemplary character, is never once thought of. A concern for the promoting of religion is entirely out of the queſtion. Perhaps he is the moſt idle and profligate of the family.

family. If he be ſent to a public ſchool for claſſical inſtruction, he is placed in a ſoil the moſt favourable for the growth of every vice to which his heart is naturally inclined. Or if he carries good principles there with him, it is ten to one but he loſes the bluſh of modeſty and pleaſing innocence, and learns ſoon to join in all thoſe practices, which, though ſome may regard as boyiſh tricks, tend in a very conſiderable degree to corrupt the heart, and to deſtroy thoſe delicate feelings of integrity and purity, which ſhould glow in every youthful breaſt.

Thus prepared, he is ſent to the Univerſity, and the mode of education there is a very fruitful ſource of the corruption of the Clergy. People at a diſtance entertain a high veneration for the ſeats of learning, and form to themſelves ideas of profoundly wiſe Profeſſors communicating liberally of their ſtores of ſacred lore, and of a ſtudious youth hanging with extacy on their lips, and making daily proficiency in learning, in piety, and in every thing that is good. But we who have been at College know the difference. There are Profeſſorſhips in every ſcience liberally endowed; and it was the deſign of the Founder, that they who held them from time to time, ſhould cultivate and give lectures on that department of literature which he choſe to patronize. But in how few inſtances do they attend to the will of their Founder? A wag lately publiſhed an account of the labours of the different Profeſſors in both Univerſities; and to the aſtoniſhment of thoſe who lived at a diſtance, *Mum*, the ſignal of ſilence, ſtood againſt the names of three-fourths of that

learned and venerable body. They who are in the ſecret know, that ſomething elſe than learning is purſued by a great part of thoſe who go to the Univerſity, and many of the Students might as well be at Bath or Newmarket, as at Oxford and Cambridge. Beſides, the learning that is moſt in vogue among thoſe who apply themſelves to ſtudy, is not that which immediately qualifies a man for the office of a Miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt. The Languages are very faſhionable at Oxford, and Mathematics at Cambridge. If a perſon be deſigned for a teacher of Aſtronomy, or a maſter of a Grammar-ſchool, theſe branches of Literature tend to qualify him for his employment. But they are not the firſt and great, far leſs the only thing requiſite for a Clergyman. He may know theſe perfectly well, and yet be the moſt unfit perſon in the world for the paſtoral office. Horace and Anacreon wrote Latin and Greek Poetry with great purity and elegance; but they knew ſo little of the moral turpitude of drunkenneſs, whoredom, and ſodomy, that they appear as the profeſſed Encomiaſts of theſe odious vices. Euclid and Archimedes were exquiſite adepts in Mathematics and Philoſophy; but ſo little were they acquainted with divine Truths, that they did not attain the knowledge of the very firſt principle of religion, the exiſtence of one true God. And it is worthy of remark, that when chriſtianity appeared in the world, men poſſeſſed of this kind of learning, which is reckoned all in all at our Univerſities, rejected the Meſſiah with diſdain, and ſtood forth among his bittereſt perſecutors and foes. How then can it

poſſibly

poſſibly be pretended, that thoſe branches of Literature, which do not bring their poſſeſſors either to the knowledge or practice of religion, can be the only things which are neceſſary to qualify a man for the chriſtian prieſthood? But while theſe are eagerly ſought after, to ſo low an ebb is the eſteem of the purſuit of theological knowledge fallen, that in both Univerſities there is not a ſyſtem of Divinity read by a Profeſſor to the Students, that is ſuperior in fulneſs to what the French Proteſtant Miniſters in Holland think it neceſſary to teach the youth of their congregations, in order to prepare them for admiſſion to the holy Sacrament. No wonder then that our Clergy are ignorant, when in addition to this, we conſider that the faſhionable objects of ſtudy in our ſeminaries of learning, lead away the mind from chriſtian theology, and influence them to conſider it as an unimportant thing. That the air of the Univerſities is peculiarly propitious to piety and devotion, and that ſingular pains are taken to inſtil an exalted ſpirit of religion into the minds of the perſons who are to be inſtructors of the nation, will not even be pretended by thoſe who have been there. What then, may it be aſked, do they learn? To ſay nothing of thoſe few who labour hard and acquire much valuable learning; ſome who are deſigned for Parſons learn to be Critics in the Greek and Latin Languages; ſome learn to calculate an Eclipſe: they learn to be fine gentlemen, and to know how to keep company with the firſt Noblemen in the land; they learn to form connections with thoſe who

have the patronage of Livings, and how to pay court to the great and wealthy: they learn how to advance the tithes, and make the moſt of a benefice; and they learn bigotry in abundance, and come out of college with a ſovereign contempt of all who are not within the pale of our church. If you doubt whether I am in jeſt or earneſt, aſk thoſe who have been at the Univerſity, and they will tell you if what I ſay is true or falſe*.

The mode of introducing the Clergy into their Livings, is another cauſe of their corruption, and is attended with the worſt conſequences to the virtue and happineſs of mankind. We think it reaſonable that the people ſhould have a vote for their Repreſentatives in Parliament; nay, it appears one of the natural rights of man, which cannot be taken away from him without manifeſt injuſtice. But every argument that can be adduced in ſupport of this, is equally appoſite and forcible to prove, that they ought to have a voice in the election of their Clergymen. If it be proper that men ſhould have a ſhare in chuſing thoſe whoſe office it is to make laws for ſecuring their temporal welfare, much more ought they to be conſulted, and to have influence, in a matter on which their eternal happineſs ſo much depends. If things be what they are deſigned to

* A Graduate of the Univerſity of Oxford expreſſes himſelf thus concerning our ſeats of learning: "I ſaw in one of our Uni-"verſities immorality, habitual drunkenneſs, idleneſs, ignorance, "and vanity, openly and boaſtingly obtruding themſelves on pub-"lic view." KNOX, ON LIBERAL EDUCATION.

repreſent,

repreſent, by the introduction of a Parſon into his Living, the cloſeſt connection is formed between him and the people of his pariſh; and as all the benefit of this connection depends on their willing and reſpectful attention to his inſtructions, it ought certainly to be a voluntary connection formed by an union of wills*.

* Beſides, if the people are to pay for the ſupport of the Miniſter, it is highly reaſonable that they ſhould have the privilege of electing to the office the perſon whom they prefer. But even if it ſhould be denied that the people pay the Clergyman, which it will not be very eaſy to prove, it does not weaken the general argument. The appointment of a Pariſh Prieſt was deſigned, either for the advantage of the individual who is the Patron, or for the benefit of the people. The man would render himſelf ridiculous who ſhould maintain the former part of the propoſition: If then it was for the benefit of the people, it ſhould be ſo not in name only, but in reality, and ought to be managed in ſuch a way as moſt effectually to promote that very important end. Mr. Burke has exhauſted all the fire of his eloquence, to make us believe that a Clergy choſen by the people muſt be a vile worthleſs crew, and that no man of genius will enter the Church on ſuch terms. His argument proves with equal force the impropriety of the election of Members of Parliament by the people, and the ſuperior excellence of their being choſen by Lords and Kings. Good-ſenſe, it ſeems, does not fall to the people's lot, and is all monopolized by Princes and by Nobles, and by ariſtocratically-appointed Prieſts. Beſides, there is another unhappy circumſtance attending his argument, and that is, that he either did not know, or elſe did not recollect (for whoſe memory is good in the paroxyſms of rage?) that in the beſt days of the primitive Church, for many hundred years after Chriſt, all the Clergy in every country were choſen by the ſuffrages of the people of their reſpective pariſhes; and that it was not till the dregs of time that the appointment of the Clergy by individuals began to take place.

But in the Church of England the people of a pariſh have no more influence in the appointment of their Miniſter, than the Great Mogul. The Patron, if he lives in the pariſh, never once thinks of conſulting them in the matter. But probably he is a ſtranger, perhaps a deiſt, or the Lord Chancellor, or the King, who never heard or knew either of the place, or the people, or the Clergyman deſtined to have the care of their ſouls. However diſagreeable the new Parſon may be to them on account of his taſte, temper, ſentiments, habits of life, conduct, preaching, &c. it matters not. They muſt take him as he is, aye, and pay him handſomely too, by the ſweat of their brows; and as Mr. Burke ſays, in regard to Kings, the Clergyman generally comes to his Living "in contempt of all his flock collectively and in-"dividually." In conſequence of this mode of introducing the Clergy, ſome of the moſt grievous abuſes have ariſen to an enormous height, the promoting of religion and morals is forgotten, and men are brought into the Church in abundance, who are utterly unfit for the meaneſt eccleſiaſtical office. A perſon who has an advowſon in the family, conſidering it in the light of a ſnug proviſion for one of his children, educates a younger ſon for the Church, and he is inducted into the Living. Young men brought up to other employments, frequently think the purchaſe of a nomination to a Living the moſt prudent mode of diſpoſing of their patrimony; and quitting the ſhop, the compting-houſe, and the camp, they enter the Church, without the pretext

of

of religion as the cauſe, and by cheating the devil, they get rid of the Canons againſt Simony, and preſent themſelves to a rich Rectory, and profeſs to take on them the care of ſouls. The gift of a friend often produces the like metamorphoſis. The Livings in the diſpoſal of a Nobleman, are conſidered as a proper compenſation to the tutor of the family who has made the tour of Europe with the young Lord. If his patronage be extenſive, the reſt are reſerved for thoſe who have promoted his intereſt in boroughs, or for Clergymen, who by every act of obſequious attention, and by every poſſible endeavour to gratify the wiſhes of every branch of the family, have rendered themſelves meritorious objects of his Lordſhip's notice. The Church preferments in the diſpoſal of the King and the Lord Chancellor, (when the family and dependants of the latter are provided for) are good things for thoſe who have powerful friends in Corporations, who exert themſelves effectually in ſupport of miniſterial Candidates in counties, and who can by their connections in Parliament ſanction and extol miniſterial acts. In this way are thouſands of Clergymen introduced into the Church. What the character of too many of them is, you may judge from the mode of their entrance. And if to this we add, that there is no proper connection formed between the Parſon and the people, and that in conſequence of this, there is a want of reſpect and affection in the flock to him whom they ought to love and eſteem as a father; we ſhall not be at a loſs to

find

find out the cauſe of the ignorance and vices of ten thouſand of the laity*.

The uſual method of riſing to the higheſt dignities of the Church, is another thing that affords great reaſon for complaint, and is one fertile cauſe of that corruption which ſo much prevails. That thoſe who attain epiſcopal honours ſhould all be very wiſe and very good men, is a matter of infinite importance to the welfare of the community, and

* It is to be conſidered as both a great injury and a misfortune, that a proper connection does not ſubſiſt between the Clergy and the People. In general, the patronage of Livings is in the hands of the King and the Nobles. As theſe are their creators, they are naturally attached to them; for to whom elſe ſhould a creature look? The people they have no other connection with, but that which ariſes from the payment of tithes; and theſe, if not given by a voluntary act, the people muſt pay by the compulſive power of the ſtrong arm of the law. From the relation which Prieſts have to Kings and Nobles, they naturally contract a fondneſs for arbitrary diſtinctions in ſociety,—become advocates for the power of the great;—and conſider the reſt of mankind, as *Gens Foutre, & le Petit Peuple.* That this is not mere theory, every man of extenſive acquaintance with the hiſtory of the world muſt allow. Every great event and convulſion of the State has ſhewn, that where the intereſt of Churchmen was not in danger, the great body of the Clergy has been unfriendly to the liberties of the people, and favourers of deſpotiſm and ariſtocracy. But is it not highly improper that ſuch men ſhould be intruſted with the office of forming the minds of youth? Certainly it is. The remedy is a Reform in the Church. The enlightened French have wiſely adopted it. It becomes us to follow their example in this reſpect, and to form ſuch a connection between the Clergy and the people; that they may have one common intereſt and one common cauſe.

the eternal happineſs of the ſouls of men. Their learning would procure them reſpect; their ſanctity of life would form the inferior Clergy to an exemplary conduct; and the ardour of their zeal would animate others to be diligent and faithful in the diſcharge of the paſtoral office. In the reign of King William, it was the common practice to raiſe to the epiſcopal dignity, none but the moſt eminent divines, who had ſignalized themſelves by their talents, their moderation, and their piety. But are theſe now the requiſites for a ſeat on the ſpiritual bench? Should I ſay that two out of three of the Biſhops have never given the world any proof of learning, genius, or chriſtian zeal, that would reflect credit on a country Vicar; let him, who is not the toad-eater of the great, contradict me if he can. What is the reaſon of this? Of late it has become faſhionable for a younger ſon of a noble family to be educated for the Church. Daſtardly ſpirits that are dazzled with the glare of titles, exult in the honour conferred on the prieſthood; but ſouls ennobled by the dignity of true religion, are grieved at the ſight. Were you to aſk either the father or the ſon: "Is it with a view to promote the glory of "God, and the ſalvation of the human race, that a "ſtation in the Church is ſought?" They would conclude from the very queſtion, you muſt be either a methodiſt or a fool. What then? A Biſhopric is a very ſnug proviſion for a younger ſon. If ſuch a man take holy orders, the intereſt of his family, and connections in Parliament and at Court, will procure him the title of Reverend Father in God, although

although he ſhould not be better qualified than Simon Magus. The preceptor of a Miniſter of State, and of his children, bids fair for epiſcopal honours. Great parliamentary intereſt has in time of need irreſiſtible weight, and will place the Mitre on a Clergyman's head. Sometimes whim and fancy in the powers that be, and lucky accidents, will raiſe to the biſhop's bench a man, who when he is ſecurely ſeated, looks around with aſtoniſhment to ſee by what means he was elevated to his preſent dignity. When we reckon all who have attained the higheſt honours of the Church by theſe modes, how many will remain behind, who have been rewarded with a Biſhopric for their learning and their talents? As to a perſon's being raiſed to the epiſcopal dignity by eminent ſanctity of life, faithfulneſs in reproving the vices of the great, and ſuperior zeal in promoting the eternal happineſs of mankind, it is an antiquated idea, a thing altogether unknown in the preſent day. Inſtead of lifting his mitred-head in Courts and Parliaments, he would be ſcarcely thought fit to officiate in the rudeſt part of England, as a Country Curate. Such are the common modes of riſing to a Biſhopric. And when once a perſon has got into the loweſt See, the manner of aſcending to the higheſt is not more favourable to the intereſts of religion. You ſhall direct your favourite Biſhop as you pleaſe. I will counſel mine to be active in defence of the Miniſtry from charge to charge, to be truſty in every point, and to defend, with all his eloquence in Parliament, every meaſure propoſed by the Premier of the day; and I'll lay a hundred to one that my man becomes

Biſhop

Biſhop of Wincheſter or Durham, Archbiſhop of York or Canterbury, before yours. But what a lamentable ſpirit of depravity does this mode of advancement in the Church produce in the Clergy, and in the people too!

The unequal diſtribution of the revenues of the Church is another ſource of its corruption. A certain degree of inequality in the value of Livings may be attended with ſome advantages. But it ſhould not be great. No Living ought to have ſo ſmall a ſalary annexed to it, as is inſufficient to ſupport a family; nor ſhould any be ſo great as to miniſter food for luxury and ambition. If the Living be ſo ſmall, as not to furniſh a decent ſubſiſtence to a Clergyman, he is a prey to want; and inſtead of having his mind wholly at leiſure to attend to his paſtoral duties, he is harraſſed and torn with anxious cares about his daily bread. On the other hand, if the emoluments of a pariſh be very large, they furniſh a lure to the heart of avarice and ſloth, and bring men into the Church ſolely with the view of leading an eaſy life, who would otherwiſe have choſen a different office. A decent mediocrity ſeems to be the proper ſituation for the Clergy; a ſimple competence, that will place them above the diſtreſſing calls of want, and below the temptations of luxury and avarice. But this is not the caſe in the Church of England. Very many Livings are not worth forty pounds a-year; and ſome are worth upwards of a thouſand. If many hundred Livings are ſo ſmall, that the Incumbents, if they have nothing elſe to ſupport them, muſt ſtarve or run in debt; and

many others are ſo large, as to enable their poſſeſſors to live in ſtate and ſplendour; is not this an evil that ought to be redreſſed, as having an unhappy influence on the minds of the Clergy, and the welfare of the people? Are not the needy Parſons, in danger of turning away their thoughts and attention from the people to the great, that by ſolicitations and attendance they may obtain a better Living; and the rich, of falling into the vices of affluence, of giving themſelves up to indolence and ſloth, of neglecting the poor, aſſociating only with the higher ranks in life, and forgetting the laborious Miniſter in the independent Gentleman. The practice of the Church in appointing Curates renders this evil greater and more extenſive.

The mode of paying the Clergy is a very ſerious evil, and exceedingly prejudicial to the piety and morals of the people. It is not without bad effects on the Clergy too, and is apt to produce a mean and an avaricious turn of mind. Tithes, which are the eſtabliſhed revenue of the Church, are very unpleaſing to thoſe who are obliged to pay them. When the people ſee a tenth part of the produce of the fields, which they have toiled with the ſweat of their brow to cultivate, ſnatched from them, they can ſcarcely help feeling a diſlike to the man who takes away ſo large a portion of the fruit of their labours. No injuſtice, it may be ſaid, is done them. Should we grant that, ſtill it is an unpleaſing mode, and exceedingly odious and diſguſting. Beſides, it may be pleaded, that it is only equitable, where land remains in the ſame ſtate in which it was before.

If

If a farmer improves his eſtate, it coſts him a conſiderable ſum of money; but the Clergyman, who bears no part of the expence, receives a tenth part of the produce of the money thus laid out, and ſhares in the fruits of his additional labour and expence, without contributing his quota or running any riſk. Perhaps it will not be an eaſy taſk to prove this to be perfectly equitable. To alledge that it has been cuſtomary from time immemorial, is an argument that will with equal force eſtabliſh the juſtice of all the oppreſſion, cruelty, and deſpotiſm, which are exerciſed on the face of the earth, provided they have been continued for ſome hundred years. It is a ſign that a perſon is hard preſſed for arguments, when he is obliged to take refuge in the weak fortreſs of *Cuſtom*. It is not a thing's being cuſtomary, but its being equitable, that ſhould recommend it to our notice. Beſides, a meaſure may be equitable when it is not expedient. Conſtant quarrels between the Clergy and the Farmers are the conſequences of their preſent mode of payment. Differences ariſe in the ordinary courſe of collecting tithes; and an attempt to raiſe the Living to its full value, uſually excites in the minds of the people prejudices ſo ſtrong againſt the Rector, that there is ſcarcely a probability of their receiving any benefit from his paſtoral labours. They hear him conſtantly with diſguſt and ſuſpicion; and inſtead of liſtening with a filial regard to his inſtructions, as flowing from the affectionate heart of a father and a friend, they conſider him in the light of their taſkmaſter and their foe, and are hardened againſt him as an auſtere man who reaps where he

did not ſow, and gathers where he did not ſtraw. The voice of hundreds of thouſands is daily raiſed againſt the Church on this account. And the extenſive effects of this diſlike, both on the Clergy and on the People, are more pernicious than is generally imagined*.

The laſt ſource of corruption that I ſhall mention, is *the want, the almoſt total want, of diſcipline, among the Clergy*. Every well-regulated ſociety has placed ſomewhere a power, to check in its public officers any tendency to negligence and unfaithfulneſs in the diſcharge of their office. Such a power there

* If we conſider Tithes in a political view, they are highly injurious to agriculture; and if there were no other reaſon for their abolition, this alone is ſufficient. An eccleſiaſtical dignitary, who has employed all his plauſibility (of which he poſſeſſes no common ſhare) in favour of the Church, is obliged to acknowledge, that the preſent mode of paying the Clergy is exceedingly injurious to the community. I ſubjoin his words as expreſſing my own ſentiments on the ſubject. "But of all inſtitu-
" tions which are in this way adverſe to cultivation and improve-
" ment, none is ſo noxious as that of Tithes. A claimant here
" enters into the produce, who contributed no aſſiſtance whatever
" to the production. When years perhaps of care and toil have
" matured an improvement; when the huſbandman ſees new
" crops ripening to his ſkill and induſtry; the moment he is
" ready to put his ſickle to the grain, he finds himſelf compelled
" to divide his harveſt with a ſtranger. Tithes are a tax not
" only upon induſtry, but upon that induſtry, upon that ſpecies of
" exertion which it is the aim of all wiſe laws to cheriſh and
" promote; and to uphold and excite which, compoſes, as we
" have ſeen, the main benefit which the community receives from
" the whole ſyſtem of trade, and the ſucceſs of commerce."

PALEY'S PRINCIPLES, Vol. 2, 8vo. 405, 406.

is in every Church, that is conſtituted with but a tolerable degree of wiſdom. I have had an opportunity, in the courſe of my life, of being well acquainted with the conſtitution of the Proteſtant Churches in ſeveral countries; and in all of them proviſion is made for the exerciſe of proper authority, in order to get vicious men from their ſtations in the Church, and to puniſh immoral behaviour and clerical infidelity. Diſcipline, it is true, cannot change the heart, and make bad Clergymen good: but it reſtrains them from vice; it makes them more aſſiduous in the diſcharge of their duty; and it gives a decency to the outward conduct, which is of ſervice to ſociety. If ſuch a power of diſcipline reſides in the Church of England, what are its effects? and when are its wholeſome ſeverities put in execution? It would be illiberal to cry out againſt them, becauſe bad men frequently appeared, and particular acts of vice were committed, which merited puniſhment. But if inſtances of vicious and immoral conduct become common, and no notice is taken of them, there is juſt reaſon of complaint, that the godly diſcipline, which the rulers of the Church ought to exerciſe over the ſons of Levi, is ſhamefully relaxed. Indeed the whole ſyſtem ſeems to be reduced to this. A Clergyman muſt not neglect certain public offices which are preſcribed in the Rubric; but how he performs them, and whether he regards every thing elſe that tends to promote religion, is not a ſubject of enquiry; here he is left entirely to himſelf. Though his life ſhould be impious and immoral, and ſuch as to make the ſacrifice of the Lord

to be abhorred, no notice is taken of it. If vice were practiſed in ſo ſecret a manner as to elude common obſervation, it might be an apology for not being the object of reprehenſion. But have we not Clergymen who are notorious drunkards, and who ſometimes come intoxicated to the performance of the moſt ſacred offices of religion? Yet they go on from year to year without a check. Others are common ſwearers and ſabbath-breakers: but they continue without moleſtation in that office, which requires thoſe who fill it to be patterns of every virtue. Some are known to be fornicators and adulterers, and their names ſtand at full length in the pariſh-books for baſtardy: but they continue without reproof as teachers of chriſtianity. Time would fail me to enumerate all the vices of the Clergy: but no notice is taken of them. The natural inference is, that the rulers of the Church either *do not know* of theſe things, or *cannot*, or *will* not redreſs them. If they *do not know* them, it diſcovers a very criminal negligence not to examine the ſtate and manner of living of thoſe, of whom the law of the land has given them the charge. If they *cannot* redreſs them, this culpable impotence is a great blemiſh in the conſtitution of the Church, and calls loudly for a reform. If they *will* not, they do not deſerve the continuance of that authority which they have abuſed by their ſupineneſs: The power of reformation ſhould be put into other hands.

If theſe things be duly conſidered, it muſt appear to every unprejudiced and enlightened reader, that a reform in the Church is abſolutely neceſſary, and

not

not a ſlight but a great, an extenſive, and a radical Reform. It is become neceſſary for the welfare of ſociety, and neceſſary for a ſtill more important purpoſe, the ſalvation of immortal ſouls. The equity of a reform will not be queſtioned by thoſe who conſider the deſign of the inſtitution of the Church, and of the revenues that ſupport it. The Church was appointed to promote religion, and the revenues for the maintenance of its teachers. If the Church ceaſe to promote religion as it ought, what is more reaſonable than that it ſhould be reformed? If its revenues be miſapplied, (as they are *Beneficium propter Officium,)* they ſhould be employed in a different manner. Some conſider the revenues of the Church as the freehold of their poſſeſſors, but it is a groſs miſtake: they are held by way of truſt for a certain purpoſe. If an officer in the army or navy convicted of cowardice or treaſon, ſhould plead, that his pay ought not to be taken away, becauſe it is his freehold; or if a Miniſter of State, when the voice of the public forced him from his ſtation, ſhould inſiſt on keeping his ſalary, as being his private property, every one would be ſenſible of the futility of his plea. Apply this method of reaſoning to the Church. It matters not that the revenues of the Church are derived from land and tithes. If Government thought proper to pay Miniſters of State, and Officers in the Army, by tithes and the rent of lands, it would be equally juſt to take their ſalaries from them, when they did not worthily fill the offices, to which their ſalaries were annexed. On the ſame principles, it will be eaſy to defend a different modification of the

eccleſiaſtical revenues, if it ſhould be found neceſſary for the public good, and for anſwering the ends deſigned by the inſtitution of the Church.

But to what quarter ſhall we look for a Reform? The Clergy have long had an opportunity of effecting it, if they had thought proper, but they have not. Indeed, who can reaſonably imagine that Satan will caſt out Satan; that a corrupt Church, more than a corrupt civil Government, will ever reform itſelf? To the people we muſt turn our eyes. To the people, the great ſource of all power and ſovereignty in human governments, we muſt look for a reform in the Church. To the people of England this important work belongs. The reader, whoſe mind has received conviction from the reaſoning in the foregoing pages, will probably enquire; what plan of Reform in the Church ought we to adopt? I am ſenſible both of the difficulty and boldneſs of ſuggeſting any thing on this head. But as what I ſhall ſay, may be the means of leading others to lay before the public plans which are more eligible, and which may in the end be adopted, my deſign will be anſwered, and my wiſhes attained, as I am conſcious that I have nothing in view but the welfare of my country. I therefore beg leave to mention two different plans that have occurred to me while thinking on the ſubject. Both proceed on the ſuppoſition, that great riches are injurious to the Church, and inſtead of promoting religion, nouriſh ambition, luxury, and ſloth; and at the ſame time, that all the Clergy ſhould be raiſed above the cruel gripe of poverty and want.

The

The firſt plan is as follows. It is computed that there are about ten thouſand pariſhes in England, and that there are between five and ſix millions of people, who call themſelves of the eſtabliſhed Church. As 1250 or 1300 people are on an average but a moderate number for a pariſh, four thouſand Clergymen are fully ſufficient for the paſtoral office. No Living ſhould be under 100l. a-year, and none above 500l. and they might be regulated in the following manner:

500 Livings in Wales, in the cheapeſt parts of England, and in country places, 100l. a-year, with a houſe and garden.

500 at 150l. a-year.
1000 at 200l.
500 at 250l.
500 at 300l.
500 at 400l.
500 at 500l.

Biſhoprics from 1000l. to 2000l. a-year.

The two Archbiſhoprics at 3000l. a-year.

Deanries, Prebends, Archdeaconries, &c. to be aboliſhed.

The election of the Clergy, to be in the people at large, or by way of delegation from them, as in France. None to be capable of a Living of 400l. a-year, who has not been five years a pariſh Prieſt. None, of 500l. who has not been ten years. None to be a Biſhop who has not been twenty years, nor an Archbiſhop who has not been twenty-five years.

No Pluralities to be allowed. No Curate to be permitted, but in caſe of a Rector's bad health or infirmities.

firmities. Non-reſidence to be abſolutely prohibited.

The Univerſities to undergo a reform. If there were four or ſix, inſtead of two, it would be more convenient. It would leſſen the expences of the Students from the remote parts of England, and it would diffuſe Literature in a far more extenſive degree. The Profeſſors, to be all men of labour in their ſeveral departments. Subſcriptions to articles not to be required at the ſeats of learning. Perhaps private ſeminaries for teaching theology, as in the church of Rome, have ſome conſiderable advantages over public lectures in the Univerſities.

Strict diſcipline to be eſtabliſhed for regulating the manners of the Clergy, and for caſting vicious men out of the Church*.

From ſuch a change as this, very great benefits would reſult. It would render the laborious part of the Clergy more comfortable in their ſituation than they are at preſent; and it would give men of talents

* The alteration here propoſed, will be a hardſhip on the preſent incumbent only: and the matter comes to this iſſue, whether the benefit of the public or of a few individuals ſhall be preferred. If in a diſeaſed ſtate of the Church a cauſtic muſt not be applied, or to drop the metaphor, if the intereſt of an individual muſt not give place when the public good requires it, a reform is a thing impoſſible: the reformation of our Church from popery, inſtead of meriting the praiſes which have been given to it, was a moſt unjuſt thing; and we ought to have been left amidſt Pagan darkneſs, or ſurrounded by crouds of Monks and Nuns. Beſides, a method may be found to render the ſituation of the preſent Incumbents as comfortable as poſſible conſiſtent with the public good.

and

and piety an opportunity of riſing to ſtations of eminence and importance: and theſe are the only men in the Church, whoſe comfort ought to be conſulted. Perhaps none have greater reaſon to complain of public neglect, and of inattention to their intereſts, than the Clergy who labour moſt diligently in the Vineyard. As for the idle Parſons who are men of pleaſure, and who do all their work by proxy, the beſt thing that could be done for the Church is to caſt them out of it, as wicked and ſlothful ſervants.

There is a Second Plan, greatly preferable to that which I have explained; but I fear that the minds of the people are not yet prepared for receiving it. A few years ago I was averſe to it myſelf, but it now appears to me the only equitable plan; and that it will finally prevail, I have not a doubt. At preſent, it may not be favourably received by ſome of my readers. But I wiſh them to conſider, that many things relating to Civil Liberty, which would have been deemed viſionary in the reign of Charles the Firſt, although the people then took up arms in the cauſe of freedom, are now deemed axioms in the ſcience of politics. To minds that are open to conviction, a few years frequently produce a ſurpriſing alteration in their views. The plan is this.—

Let the eſtabliſhment of any one ſyſtem of opinions and mode of worſhip be deſtroyed. Place all the people of England on an equal footing in regard to religion. Aboliſh the preſent mode of paying the Clergy by tithes. Let a certain ſum be aſſeſſed on every Eſtate, on land ſixpence in the pound, and on houſes, ninepence or a ſhilling. Oblige the poſſeſ-

ſors

ſors to pay this ſum for the ſupport of religion. But let them pay it to what denomination of chriſtians they pleaſe. If one prefer the Epiſcopal mode of worſhip, let him give his quota to the Clergyman of that denomination. If another be a Diſſenter, let the Diſſenting Miniſter have his tax. If a third be a Methodiſt, let the Methodiſt Teacher receive his contribution. If a fourth be a Catholic, let him adjudge his proportion to the Romiſh Prieſt. Only oblige every man to give his aſſeſſment for the ſupport of religion; but let him chuſe to what ſect he pleaſes to give it*.

Having

* Some have ſeriouſly objected, that if there were no eſtabliſhed Church, religion muſt take its flight from earth. But the objection ariſes from ignorance of the nature of religion and of hiſtory. The minds of men in other reſpects ſenſible and well-informed, become perverted by crooked politics, and they erroneouſly apply to religion what is very applicable to their own political ſchemes. Theſe need ſome power to uphold them; for they are the work of ſubtle men, and have no other foundation than force or fraud. But the chriſtian religion comes from God, and he will ſupport it without the aid either of the Magiſtrate's purſe or ſword. If theſe gentlemen would take the trouble, to conſider the nature of the chriſtian religion, they would find it calculated to ſupport itſelf by its own innate excellence; and that its great Author, who perfectly knew his own ſyſtem, and the human heart which it was deſigned to influence, has made no proviſion for its ſupport by the arm of the civil Magiſtrate. Some Philoſophers have thought it neceſſary to provide the back of an elephant for the earth to reſt upon. But they may lead their elephant away, and the earth will ſtill remain in its place. The Magiſtrate's power to ſupport the goſpel of Chriſt is equally uſeleſs, and more hurtful. — Beſides, let thoſe gentlemen trace the hiſtory of chriſtianity. At firſt it had no eſtabliſhment; it had nothing

Having propoſed the plan, I proceed to prove the equity of it, and to point out its advantages.

As to the equity of this plan, I am confident that nothing but a right view of the matter is wanting to eſtabliſh

nothing but its own goodneſs to recommend it to notice; it made its way in the world in oppoſition to Magiſtrates, and all earthly power; and it continued to increaſe, till from the multitude of its conqueſts, it became the eſtabliſhed religion. By that means it was corrupted, it loſt its energy, and its union with the State deſtroyed its purity. If the objectors will deſcend to modern times, they will find that the Proteſtants in France, who had no eſtabliſhment, retained their numbers till they werec ruſhed by the barbarous arm of the civil power. The Diſſenters in England have now ſubſiſted for a hundred and thirty years without the ſupport of the Magiſtrate. Their numbers are as great now as they ever were, and they are likely to encreaſe; and religion is as well underſtood and as carefully practiſed among them as in any eſtabliſhed Church in Chriſtendom. Theſe facts inconteſtibly prove that religion can ſubſiſt without an eſtabliſhment, and without the interference of the civil Magiſtrate; and they demonſtrate the groſs abſurdity of an aſſertion made by one of the Bench of Biſhops; an aſſertion the moſt diſgraceful to chriſtianity that ever was uttered by the mouth of man: "That Religion cannot ſupport itſelf by its own ener-"gies, but requires the aid of the civil Magiſtrate for its ſup-"port."

An objection uſually joined to that which has juſt been conſidered, is, that if there were no eſtabliſhment, we ſhould have a *low-bred, illiterate* Clergy. As to a man's being low bred, it ſignifies little, provided he be well bred. The Apoſtles of Chriſt executed their office with as much propriety, as if they had been the ſons of Herod or Auguſtus. It is *merit* that diſtinguiſhes one man from another; and if a man have piety and learning, his birth, or his father's employment, are matters of nearly as much conſequence as the colour of his hair. Beſides, this is not an objection that comes with a good grace from Engliſhmen. Theſe perſons

forget

eſtabliſh it. Society is a partnerſhip, where every member of the community throws his quota into one common ſtock. Some put in more, others leſs; every one puts in his all. This being the caſe, regard ſhould be had to every perſon: the advantage

forget, that many of the higheſt Dignitaries of the Church are men of low birth. The father of the late Biſhop Halifax was a maltſter; and if we may rely on the authority of the newſpapers, the preſent worthy Archbiſhop of Canterbury is the ſon of a butcher. This is not mentioned as a reflection on thoſe Prelates; on the contrary, it does them honour; for it ſhows they muſt have had merit. If we were to go back two hundred years, and view the employments of the anceſtors of one half of the preſent nobility of England, we might find that they had little reaſon to boaſt of their pedigree, and to hold their heads higher than their neighbours. Even good Queen Anne was the grand-daughter of a Barriſter.

As to the other part of the objection, that without an eſtabliſhment the Clergy would be illiterate, it is not ſupported by facts. If the Clergy of the Church and of the Diſſenters be compared, it will be found that there are at leaſt as many men of talents and learning, who have inſtructed the world by their writings, among the Diſſenters, in proportion to their number, as in the eſtabliſhment; and as many who are well acquainted with theology, and with the ſcriptures. If we turn our eyes abroad, we ſhall obſerve the ſame thing. The Remonſtrants in Holland, who have no ſupport from Government, have produced as many men of learning as the eſtabliſhed Church there. And while the Proteſtant religion was tolerated in France, there were as many learned men, in proportion, among the Preſbyterian Clergy there, as among the Catholics of the eſtabliſhed Church, notwithſtanding all the power and the immenſe revenues that they poſſeſſed. If any can contradict theſe facts, they will deſtroy the argument, but not till then.

For the thoughts and reaſoning in this Note, I am indebted to a friend who is a Diſſenter, to whom I propoſed the objections.

of

of each individual ſhould be conſulted, and his profits ſhould be on a proportion to his capital*. Society is a partnerſhip, into which every man puts his ſhare or ſtock, not as a ſervant with his maſter, not as an inferior with ſuperiors, but as an equal with his equals; and he has a right, that his ſhare ſhall be properly managed, and that he ſhall enjoy the benefit of it, juſt as well as the man that puts in the largeſt ſhare. If it once be ſaid, "That perſon has put "in but a ſmall ſhare, it does not deſerve to be "attended to;" there is an end of equal government. Nothing is left but tyranny. A falſe principle is aſſumed, "that the great ſhould have all, and the "poor nothing." But grant me this equitable maxim, that every man in proportion to his ſhare of the public ſtock, ſhould reap advantages in ſociety; and you will ſee how naturally it leads to the adoption of the plan which is now before us. Juſtice

* Some perſons have compared civil ſociety to a family; and where the greater part of the community have been of one ſentiment in religious matters, and a conſiderable body of the people, though by no means equal to the other, have differed from them, they have called the firſt the *Maſter*, and the laſt the *Servants*; and then they argue thus:—A maſter of a family has a right to demand of his ſervants every thing that is proper, and if they do not like it, they may leave the family. But unhappily for this compariſon, it is not the ſmaller part of the community concerning which they reaſon, that receives wages, and is paid by the public, but the Miniſters of State, Generals, Admirals, and the Clergy, who are apt to conſider themſelves as Maſters. Now as Maſters do not receive wages from their Servants, but Servants from their Maſters, this brief ſtatement overturns the whole ſyſtem built on the compariſon of a Family, from its very foundation.

requires, that as a man ſhould enjoy advantages equal to his ſhare, ſo he ſhould not be obliged to endure burdens greater than what fall to his proportion. This is applicable to religious, as well as to civil matters. That every man ſhould contribute his quota to ſupport religion, is perfectly equitable. If a certain part of the community differ from the reſt in their tenets, ſtill the ſupport of religion is a duty incumbent on them. Should their own mode of religion have an equal tendency to promote the public good, they do as much ſervice to ſociety by ſupporting it, as if they received the religion of the majority in every iota. But if beſides this they ſhould be obliged to ſupport the religion of the majority, a burden is laid on them twice as large as on the reſt of the community. This ſurely, if any thing can be, is a hardſhip: equity is caſt out, and mere power and numbers take its place. It is tyranny exerciſed by the majority over a portion of their fellow-ſubjects. Perhaps it may be ſaid, "The "majority have a right to do what they pleaſe." You mean *power* inſtead of *right*. If they have a right to do what they pleaſe, they have a right to confiſcate the eſtates of the minority, and to apply the money to their own uſe. This inſtance is ſufficient, to ſhew every convincible man the futility of the objection, and that the majority has not a right to do any thing but what is juſt and equitable. We are ſenſible of the injuſtice of ſuch a conduct in caſes that are exactly ſimilar. Let us ſuppoſe a company of one hundred merchants trading to a certain place: —four-ſcore of them put in a thouſand pound ſtock each:—

each:—the other twenty put in two thouſand each:—every thing is to be carried by a majority of votes. When they come to divide their profits, a propoſal is made, that they who put in a thouſand pounds, ſhall ſhare ten per cent. and they who put in two thouſand pounds ſhall ſhare only five per cent. An objection is inſtantly raiſed againſt it, it is put to the vote, and carried by four to one. But is it equitable? No. Every body cries out againſt it as unjuſt. He who would plead as an argument in its favour, that it was fairly carried by a majority, would be thought to have either a bad underſtanding, that could not diſtinguiſh between right and wrong, or a very depraved heart, that did not feel the difference between juſtice and injuſtice. Every man of common ſenſe would call it an exertion of tyranny taking the advantage of numbers and of powers. Is the decree of the majority of a Nation, obliging the ſmaller number to pay for a mode of religion which they diſlike, while they ſupport their own, a caſe very diſſimilar? *

* Or to produce one that may appear more in point. Let us ſuppoſe a thouſand people to join in one common meſs. Seven hundred of them cannot eat boiled beef; the other three hundred cannot eat it roaſted. Dinner is to be provided by a majority of votes. It is carried by 700 votes for roaſt-beef. The 300 ſay, "Gentlemen, we cannot eat it, pray let us all have boiled beef: "it is as cheap and as wholeſome." "No, ſay the others, we "cannot eat it dreſſed ſo." "Well, replies the minority, we "ſaid this to try you. We do not deſire you to eat what you "do not like. But ſhew the ſame kindneſs to us; and while roaſt "beef is provided for 700, let there be boiled beef for the re-"mainder,

The majority of the people of England are of the eſtabliſhed Church. Above one-fifth of the nation diſſent from the eſtabliſhment. Methodiſts, Preſbyterians, Independents, Baptiſts, Quakers, and Roman Catholics, form a very conſiderable body as to numbers, wealth, and influence. The principles of the Catholics, which were formerly ſuppoſed hoſtile to ſociety, are now allowed to be favourable. All the others, if we may judge from the tenets, as well as from the lives of their votaries, are as conducive to the welfare of the community, as the eſtabliſhment itſelf. That all theſe ſhould pay for the ſupport of the Miniſters of their reſpective ſects, is both reaſonable and proper. But is it reaſonable and juſt, that they ſhould likewiſe, in addition to this, be obliged to pay for the religion of the members of the eſtabliſhment, when they neither aſſent to many of its dogmas, nor ſubmit to its miniſters and inſtitutions? This remains to be proved. When an eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhment was firſt formed in this country, all

" mainder, and we all ſhall be gratified." " No, ſays the ma-
" jority, we will have nothing but roaſt-beef; if you will have
" any thing elſe, you muſt pay for it beſides." " But it is hard,
" they reply, to pay not only for our own dinner, but for yours."
" That does not ſignify, ſay the others, we are the majority, and
" we will have it ſo." I do not imagine that ſuch conduct as this would ever be celebrated for its equity and fairneſs. Many would not ſcruple to call it power ſanctioning injuſtice. But can that which is deemed inequitable, in regard to food for the body, become perfectly juſt, when applied to food for the ſoul? The analogy is ſo perfect, that it muſt carry with it conſiderable weight to every unprejudiced mind.

were

were of one religion. It was the darkneſs of popery. Civil and religious liberty was imperfectly underſtood, and both ſwords were employed to preſerve a rigid uniformity. But the ſtate of things is now widely different, as all acknowledge; yet the ſame principle remains in the eſtabliſhed Church, as if every thing were exactly in the ſame ſtate as it was four hundred years ago. Ought the wide difference in the ſentiments of men to produce no difference in the ſtate of things? But it may be ſaid, "The "King and the Queen, and the Royal Family, and "almoſt all the Nobles, and the Parliament, and "the great Men, and the mighty Men, are of the "eſtabliſhed Church, and ſhould not the reſt of the "people ſubmit to their judgment?" When theſe great ones of the earth ſhall ſhew a ſatisfactory commiſſion, to legiſlate in religious matters for the inhabitants of the land, I will humbly bow to their authority. They muſt, however, produce ſomething more than cuſtom and mere power and numbers, to render their commiſſion valid. Till then, I ſay, that Kings and Nobles have a full right to chuſe Religion for themſelves, and to pay for it amply if they pleaſe; but I cannot perceive that they have any authority from ſcripture, reaſon, or equity, to chuſe a religion for all the people, or to make all the people pay for theirs. The language which they and the majority of the people of England who compoſe the eſtabliſhed Church, hold to above one-fifth part of the community, is to this effect:—"We know "that you differ from us in religious matters, that "you cannot conſcientiouſly join with us in conſtant

" communion, and that you ſupport your own Mi-
" niſters; but we are the majority, and you muſt
" do as we pleaſe. We inſiſt on it, that you ſhall
" ſupport our mode of religion by as large a tax
" as we. You may complain of this as unjuſt, but
" we do not care for that: the power is in our
" hands; we have a majority, to which you muſt
" according to the rules of all ſocieties ſubmit; and
" if you will not ſubmit willingly, we will compel
" you." Theſe, it will be acknowledged, are words of truth, and words of power too. But are they words of reaſon and equity? Do they derive their force from the golden rule, " To do unto others as
" we would have them do unto us?" I need not ſay from what ſource they flow. I only add, that when it ſhall be proved, by fair argument, that the majority of a nation has a right to make all the reſt pay for their religion, I will engage by the ſame arguments to prove, that they have an equal right to make them pay, if they pleaſe, for the expences of their table, their houſe-rent, and their equipage*.

If

* If it be doubted whether or not a Government may eſtabliſh the religion of the majority of the people, what ſhall we ſay of the eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhment in Ireland? It is an *unique*. That country contains three grand diviſions of people, Roman Catholics, Preſbyterians, and Proteſtant Epiſcopalians of the Engliſh form. The laſt are the feweſt in number, yet ſtrange to tell! the Epiſcopalian Proteſtants are the Eſtabliſhed Church. If you ſearch the chriſtian world from end to end, no ſuch thing can be produced. Popery never thought of any thing ſo abſurd. In ſome Mahometan provinces, where religion is propagated and maintained by the ſword, inſtances of it may perhaps be found. And they are not

If theſe conſiderations be maturely weighed, the equity of the plan that I am recommending, will I hope, appear evident to many of my readers. The

 idea

not diſſimilar; for certainly, by the ſword alone can a thing ſo ridiculous be ſupported. In ſome pariſhes in the weſt of Ireland, there is not a Proteſtant to be ſeen: in ſome parts of the North, the people are almoſt all Preſbyterians; and both have Miniſters of their own faith to inſtruct them. But they are obliged to pay tithes to Epiſcopalian Clergymen, who have no people to inſtruct, who notwithſtanding are appointed to the benefice. The church of Rome has a practice reſembling this. They appoint Biſhops to Sees in Mahometan countries; but if their practice be equally ridiculous, it is leſs oppreſſive, for they do not force the Mahometans to pay them tithes. The Prelates have only the empty title. But this is not the caſe in Ireland. The two largeſt bodies, beſides paying for their own religion, muſt pay for the religion of the third, which is the ſmalleſt body; and pay too in ſuch proportions, as if all the people of Ireland were of that religion. On what principles can this practice be defended? If there be ſuch a thing as oppreſſion, is this not it? We have heard of the backwardneſs of ſome, eſpecially of the Catholics, to pay tithes. To me the wonder is, that they can be prevailed on to pay at any rate. They muſt be of a very meek, ſubmiſſive ſpirit. Let us ſuppoſe, that the Roman Catholics were to be eſtabliſhed in England, and that all the reſt of the people were to be obliged to pay tithes to Romiſh Prieſts. Every mouth would be opened in complaints. But is it not as great a hardſhip, that Catholics and Preſbyterians in Ireland, ſhould be obliged to pay tithes to Church of Englandmen, as that Epiſcopalians and Diſſenters ſhould pay tithes to Catholics in England. The caſe is exactly ſimilar. It has been alledged as a reaſon for the Iriſh eſtabliſhment, (and is it not an Iriſh one indeed?) that Eſpiſcopalians are better ſubjects than Catholics and Preſbyterians. But the aſſertion is unfounded: it is contradicted by fact. Look into France, Spain, Italy, and Germany, and you will find the Catholics are juſt as attentive to every ſocial duty, and political relation, as the Epiſcopalian Proteſtants

are.

idea of adopting it may ſtill ſhock the feelings of not a few. Some years ago it ſhocked my own. But it now appears to me perfectly equitable, and the moſt

are. And if you ſurvey Scotland, Holland, Switzerland, Pruſſia, &c. the Preſbyterians will be found juſt as good ſubjects as the Church-of-Englandmen are. And why ſhould they not? The great principles of their religion, which influence to relative duties, are the ſame. If the meaning be, that the Clergy of the Church of England moſt readily and meekly bend to all the wiſhes of every ſucceeding Miniſtry, and juſtify their conduct, and ſupport their meaſures, I will not contend the point: but I beg pardon, my ideas of a good ſubject were different.

It has been often ſaid, that the Church of England is beſt ſuited to the Engliſh Conſtitution, which is a limited monarchy; the Church of Rome, to deſpotiſm; and Preſbytery, to a republic. This aſſertion has been made by a great many writers, by ſome of very conſiderable note. One man has followed another without reflection. For if we have recourſe to incontrovertible facts, they expreſsly contradict it. Preſbytery is eſtabliſhed in Scotland, but the people there for this century paſt have ſhewn themſelves as peaceable ſubjects, and as much attached to monarchy, as Epiſcopalians have been. The two rebellions which appeared there, were the work not of Preſbyterians, but of Epiſcopalians and Catholics. The Preſbyterian mode of eccleſiaſtical polity is eſtabliſhed in ſome of the moſt deſpotic States in Germany, and the people are ſtill and quiet. On the other hand, in the republics of Venice and Genoa, the Roman Catholic is the eſtabliſhed religion, and yet the people are ſtaunch republicans. There is a fact, that tends ſtill more effectually to deſtroy the credit of this political noſtrum. In ſome of the Swiſs Cantons, Preſbytery is the eſtabliſhed religion; in others, the Church of Rome; and from the hiſtory of the country, both ſeem to live under the ſame mode of civil Government with equal readineſs and pleaſure. Is not the aſſertion then a mere fallacy which has had credit given to it without examination or reaſon? If from facts we proceed to conſider the nature of the thing, we find an equal want of conviction. Is

there

moſt eligible plan that could poſſibly be adopted: It will, I flatter myſelf, by repeated views, appear ſo to others.

The advantages which will reſult from it are many and great. It will prove exceedingly beneficial both to the civil and religious intereſts of the community, both to the preſent and eternal happineſs of mankind.

The weight of the taxes in England is ſo great, as to threaten the ruin of the nation. The labouring poor, who form a conſiderable part of the community, are ſo burdened, and proviſions are by means of the taxes rendered ſo dear, that their wages are not ſufficient, with the moſt frugal œconomy, to ſupport a man and his wife, and two or three children. Forty years ago, it was pleaſing to ſee the neatneſs of their houſes, and of their furniture:—now they are in general dirty hovels, with ſcarcely any furniture in them. Then they lived in comfort on the good things of the land:—now they can hardly obtain the coarſeſt food to ſatisfy hunger. If they be out of employment for a week, the wretched creatures are obliged to ſeek refuge in a work-houſe*. It is there-

there any thing in the name of the Church of England, in the Parſon's ſurplice or gown, in the title of Rector or Dean, or the venerable appellation of Biſhop or Archbiſhop, which produces by magic the effect aſſigned? No, No.

* The rich and great are unacquainted with the neceſſities of the poor. They ſee nothing but plenty; and they are apt to imagine that there are no children of want. But it is a great miſtake. There never were ſo many indigent people in England, as at this preſent

fore a matter of the utmoſt conſequence, if poſſible, to lighten their burdens, and to enable them to live more comfortably. We are loudly called to this from motives of humanity, intereſt, and ſafety. *Humanity* will influence the moſt generous minds. Let thoſe whom humanity cannot move, reflect, that

preſent time. A numerous and reſpectable claſs in ſociety, that forty years ago lived in a comfortable manner on 40, 50, or 60 pounds of annual income, are now almoſt in a ſtarving condition. The price of the neceſſaries and conveniences of life, is nearly doubled ſince that time, and their incomes remain the ſame. The profits of tradeſmen, manufacturers, and merchants, may keep pace with the riſe of proviſions; but this is not the caſe with the claſs of people that I have mentioned. They have more reaſon than Job had, to curſe the day when thoſe Miniſters were born, whether Pitts or Norths, who involved the country in deſtructive wars, and raiſed its taxes to an intolerable height. Some perſons have calculated, that thoſe who live in a moderate manner, pay at leaſt one half of what they expend, in taxes to the State. It ought to be a good Government indeed that is worth ſo much. Notwithſtanding our boaſted liberty, we are more oppreſſed with taxes than any nation on the face of the earth, and nine-tenths of the people are never aſked whether they chuſe them or not. They have no vote in the matter. Their only buſineſs is to pay them. But beſides the claſs that I have mentioned, there is one behind in a far more wretched ſtate. Theſe are the labouring poor. If we take the whole of England on an average, and allow for Sundays, &c. they do not earn above fifteen-pence a-day. If there be a wife and two or three children to ſupport, they muſt be almoſt ſtarved; and if the man ſhould be two or three days out of work, they muſt all be a burden on the community. However much we may talk of the flouriſhing ſtate of the country, I venture to aſſert, without fear of contradiction, that the ſituation of the labouring poor was never ſo deplorable as it is now; and if ſomething be not ſoon done for their relief, the conſequences of their ſufferings may be more ſerious than many imagine.

ſhould

ſhould the common people be burdened but a little more, if they be patient, they muſt fall as a load on the middling claſs in ſociety, who have already too many taxes to pay; or, if they ſhould be driven to deſperation, they will riſe againſt their oppreſſors, and take vengeance on thoſe whom they conſider as the cauſes of their ſufferings. Should they ever take this into their mind (and what will not a long courſe of bitter ſufferings dictate?) they will prove rough reformers indeed, and will make thoſe who now diſregard them, wiſh they had conſidered their ſituation, and done that for them in a peaceable way, which they are forced to do for themſelves with terror and with blood. To lighten their burdens, and make their lives more comfortable, ſhould be the moſt ſtrenuous endeavour of the public at this time. It will be accompliſhed in ſome degree, by the plan which I have laid down. The preſent mode of proviſion for the Clergy will not be needed, as they are to be paid by a ſmall and equitable tax impoſed for that purpoſe. Conſequently tithes, and all the preſent revenues of the Church, which are the property of the community, will be entirely at its diſpoſal, and may be applied towards lightening the burdens of the people. The revenues of the Church of one kind and another, are, on a moderate calculation, ſufficient to pay the intereſt of above threeſcore millions annually of the National Debt; and if they were applied for this purpoſe, the Legiſlature would have it in their power to take off many of thoſe taxes that fall heavieſt on the poor, and to lighten their preſent burdens in a conſiderable degree; a ſtep that

would

would prove highly beneficial to the community. One of the firſt things to be done, is to aboliſh two-thirds of the public-houſes in England. They are the incentives to intemperance, and the nurſeries of vice. Government may encourage them for the ſake of revenue, but it is a ſhocking thing when on any account a Government encourages, what has a natural tendency to corrupt the morals of the people. It ſhould be remembered, that what Government gains, the people loſe; and if by means of ale-houſes a large ſum of money is brought into the public Treaſury, which muſt otherwiſe have been provided for by a new tax, the people are obliged to pay as much as the amount of that tax would have been, for the ſupport of thoſe, who have conſumed in the reſorts of intemperance the money which ſhould have been devoted to the maintenance of their family; and they pay it with the diſagreeable addition of this afflictive thought, that thoſe whom they are compelled to ſupport, are by the preſent ſyſtem of finance, rendered not only poor, but vicious.

Another advantage attending this plan is, that we ſhall certainly have a more exemplary, learned, and laborious body of Clergy, than England has ſeen for theſe hundred years. When all are placed on a level, emulation will be productive of the happieſt effects. The preſent numerous race of vicious Clergymen will throw their gowns away. Whatever ſome may think of the judgment of the people, this good quality muſt be allowed, that they deſpiſe and deteſt an immoral Clergyman; and if it were in their power, they would not give him either their attendance

endance or ſupport. Idle Parſons, who are men of ffluence, will quit the Church, and live upon their ortunes; and we ſhall have in their place good men who will attend carefully to their duty, who will ultivate the friendſhip of their flocks, and endeavour to promote their edification and their happineſs; nd Miniſters of different denominations will vie with each other in ſuperiority of public performances, and diligence in private and perſonal inſtruction*.

As by this plan the Clergy will be reformed, the people will likewiſe feel its ſalutary influence. I

* Converſing lately with a Diſſenter on this ſubject, and mentioning it as one diſadvantage of the plan, that it might produce in Miniſters too complying a temper, in order to conciliate the favour of the people, he ſaid in anſwer, "There is no human "ſcheme without ſome diſadvantages, and we muſt adopt that "which has the feweſt. But you are afraid without reaſon. Fact "is againſt you. Our Miniſters, who depend entirely on their "people, tell us our faults more plainly than your Clergyman do "yours. And we remark, that thoſe Miniſters amongſt us, who "are moſt plain and faithful in reproving us for what is amiſs, "and pointing out our duty in every inſtance, without fearing the "face of man, are moſt eſteemed; and ſo far is their fidelity from "injuring, that it rather promotes their worldly intereſt; and "this will be generally found to be the caſe. Beſides, added he, "I intreat you to remember that this is the primitive mode; "that no proviſion is made in the New Teſtament for any other; "that an alteration from this has been productive of infinitely "more diſadvantages than benefits; and that very many of the "corruptions of the Church may be traced to this ſource. If "theſe arguments do not convince you, look around the world; "compare the Miniſters who are ſupported by voluntary contribution, with thoſe who are provided for by the State; and then "tell me candidly and frankly, which body contains, in proportion to its ſize, the greateſt number of ſtudious, laborious, "and exemplary men."

greatly

greatly admire the Engliſh character. There are many excellent qualities belonging to it, which give it a capacity of appearing with ſingular eclat. But I have often reflected with extreme concern, that the common people are more neglected as to religion in England, than in any other country in Europe, perhaps Ruſſia excepted. In this important reſpect, they are leſs indebted to Government, and the Church, than any of their neighbours. But let there be once good and faithful Clergymen, and we ſhall ſee the Engliſh character appear with that dignity, to which it has a claim. Inſtead of men ignorant of every principle of chriſtianity, we ſhall ſee the lower claſs in ſociety become intelligent and well-informed. Inſtead of ſots and idlers, and burdens on the public, we ſhall find them temperate, induſtrious, and able to ſupport themſelves. Inſtead of theſe petty vices which ſap the foundation of ſociety, we ſhall have the happineſs to behold men of integrity, truth, and piety. Wonderful inſtances of this nature are produced by the moſt illiterate Methodiſts, in ſome of the moſt abandoned characters; and if we once ſaw equal pains taken in every part of the country (which this plan would in a great degree produce), we might hope that a reformation among the poor would become general. Inſtead of the multitude of crimes which are daily committed,—inſtead of jails full of felons,—inſtead of thoſe frequent tranſportations, and numerous capital puniſhments, which abound far more among us than in any other country perhaps in the world, we have good reaſon to conclude, that with proper paſtoral inſtruction and care, not one-

tenth

enth part of the crimes would be committed, and not one-tenth part of the executions which now disgrace us, would take place. The ſectaries I have often heard boaſt, that few of their followers are to be found in jails or on gibbets, and aſſert that the numerous crimes and puniſhments are in a great meaſure owing to the indolence of the Clergy; but I found my judgment chiefly on another conſideration. I have had occaſion to viſit ſeveral countries in Europe, where the Clergy are eminent for their piety and their labours. Capital puniſhments are there unfrequent; crimes are few in number. The common people are intelligent, regular, induſtrious, and temperate. Whence ariſes the difference between theſe, and the common people of England? Very ſenſible men among them aſcribe it in a great meaſure to the ſuperior care and vigilance of their Clergy; and from examining the matter with ſome degree of attention, I am convinced that it is the caſe. Should we not then be anxious for the ſucceſs of a plan which holds out advantages of ſuch magnitude? But this is not all. If perſons in the middle and ſuperior walks of life were to have conſtantly before their eyes, inſtead of Clergymen, who are their companions in vice, and leaders in every thing vain and frivolous, men of unfeigned piety, benevolence, and zeal, it would lead them to reverence religion; and if inſtead of liſtening to a trifling flimſy eſſay, they heard from week to week, ſolid, judicious, and affectionate diſcourſes, explaining and enforcing the truths of chriſtianity, we might hope to ſee a ſpirit of irreligion die away, vice as aſhamed hide its head, and every

ſocial

ſocial virtue abound among all ranks in an eminent degree.

There is another advantage ariſing from this plan, which deſerves our notice. Thoſe who wiſh beſt to their country, muſt be deſirous to ſee all the people living together in peace and love. This conſtitutes the ſtrength of a ſociety; and what is perhaps of more importance, it enhances the delights and pleaſures of ſociety. Now we ſee difference of ſentiments occaſion coldneſs, diſtance, and reſerve, nay, ſometimes hatred and rancour. Birmingham is a proof. But do ſuch evil tempers ſpring merely from difference of ſentiments? No. They originate from another cauſe. One party now conſiders itſelf as ſuperior to the reſt, and treats them as proud and impious ſchiſmatics; and the others feel themſelves hurt at being viewed as inferiors, and as guilty of unjuſtifiable ſchiſm. Hence the mutual acrimony and diſguſt. But place all on a level, and the ſpirit of diſcord will expire, and all will be harmony and affection. America, where this equality prevails, furniſhes a proof of it in a fair example. There all ſects of religion live in perfect concord and happineſs; and the reaſon is, there is no diſparity. Inſtead of people of one party viewing themſelves as ſons of the family, and others as baſtards and ſlaves, all look on each other as brethren, and demean themſelves as ſuch. The plan that I recommend, would produce the ſame diſpoſition among us.

But a conſideration of the greateſt weight, and which enforces the plan of a Reform more ſtrongly than any thing that has been yet adduced, is ſtill behind; and

that

that is, the eternal happineſs of the ſouls of men. If we for a moment lay this to heart, we muſt be ſenſible of its infinite importance, and the preſent conduct of multitudes of the Clergy muſt ſtrike us with horror. For a Clergyman not to know how to direct a miſerable guilty creature in the way to Heaven, is ignorance ſo culpable, that language furniſhes not an epithet ſufficiently ſtrong to expreſs it. For a Clergyman not to have leiſure to attend to the ſalvation of immortal ſouls, for following the hounds, paying homage to the great, correcting an ancient Heathen writer, or running from one ſcene of amuſement to another, carries in it ſuch impiety as makes us ſhudder. For a Clergyman not to have an inclination for the divine employment of inſtructing the ignorant, comforting the diſtreſſed, and promoting the eternal happineſs of men, but inſtead of it to chuſe rather to be employed as a Commiſſioner of the highways, to act as a Juſtice of the Peace, to have a hand in every dirty and raſcally buſineſs that occurs in the place, and to be the buſy body and meddler in every man's worldly matters.—Can this be the diſpoſition of any man that ever entered into holy orders, and ſaid that he was moved by the ſpirit of God, to undertake the ſacred office? Whether this is an ideal repreſentation, or a deſcription of what paſſes every day before our eyes, let obſervation bear her impartial teſtimony. But if ſuch a plan of reform as I propoſe, were to take place, we might rationally hope, that thouſands and tens of thouſands who now are every year allowed to periſh in their ſins, would by the proper exertions

of

of paſtoral care, become true diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt, and be made partakers of eternal felicity in a future ſtate. This is a thing ſo important, and the happineſs depending on it is ſo great, that every lover of mankind ſhould enter with zeal into the conſideration of the ſubject; and every ſincere chriſtian, who is ſeeking after immortal life, and who is deſirous that others may poſſeſs it, ſhould employ his moſt vigorous efforts to obtain a reformation in the Church, that an end may be put to the preſent depraved ſyſtem, which from the criminal negligence and bad examples of the Clergy, precipitates multitudes into endleſs deſtruction; and that thoſe who are now periſhing in ignorance and vice, may be inſtructed and reclaimed, and fitted for the bleſſedneſs of a future world. Ought a falſe tenderneſs for the intereſts of the Clergy, as a body, in their preſent ſtate of corruption; ought a fond concern for their enjoyment of affluence, eaſe, rich livings, and ſnug ſinecures, ever to be named or brought into competition with the eternal welfare of millions? Certainly not. If we allow any worldly policy, and ſelfiſh views, to prevent us from purſuing this important object to the utmoſt of our power, it becomes us very ſeriouſly to enquire, how we ſhall anſwer at the awful tribunal of the great God, our righteous Judge, for the proper improvement of the talents with which he has entruſted us in this ſtate of probation.

THE END.

BRITISH 19 JY 77 MUSEUM